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ABSTRACT

The author investigated the discrepancies between self-perceptions and the perceptions of others, in order to examine the assumption that perceived personality characteristics might be used as a basis to identify communication problems within an organization. Through the use of the Interpersonal Check List, staff members of the University of Montana residence hall rated perceptions of themselves and other groups within the organization. Self-perceptions and perceptions of others were scored along a dominance-submission dimension and a love-hostility dimension. Average intensity scores for each of the sixteen variables which comprise the Interpersonal Check List were determined. Although the actual significance of discrepancies between self-perceptions and perceptions by others need to be determined by future research, the author discusses the advantage of such an approach in determining communication problems within an organization. (Author/RN)

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A STUDY OF PERCEIVED PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS AND COMMUNICATION IN A COMPLEX RESIDENCE UNIT*

by

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BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE:

How an individual reacts to a person is undoubtedly affected by his perception of that person. As Davis /1:31/ has pointed out: "Man perceives his experiences in an organized framework or structure. The framework is not in the physical stimulus, but in the observer; so two people may have different perceptions of the same set of facts. Each perceives the facts in terms of his problems, his interests, and his background. Concerning the concrete physical world, two person's perceptions can be fairly close together, but in the social world two perceptions rarely agree . . ."

Closely aligned to the idea of perception is the concept of role defined as "the pattern of actions expected of a person in his activities involving others." /1:45/ Role arises as a result of the position a person occupies in the social structure as he interacts with other people. Connecting this idea to the concept of perception, we see the activities of managers and workers alike are guided by their role perceptions.

Role is then a combination of perceptions, how an individual thinks he is supposed to act in a given situation, and expectations, how others think an individual is supposed to act in a given situation. This combination requires that a person is able to see his own role as required by the function he is performing. Then he needs to see the role of the person he contacts, and finally, he needs to see his role as seen by the other person. /1/

It seems reasonable then that where there is wide variance in a manager's role perception of his job and employees' role expectations of that job, there tends to be poor motivation and inefficiency.

Difficulty in communicating may even result because individuals may not be talking about the same things in the same way.

This discussion suggests that a means whereby self-perceptions and others' perceptions might be objectively scored would be a helpful addition to any communication audit procedures within an organization. The Interpersonal Check List (ICL) as developed through research done on the Interpersonal Dimension of Personality appears to facilitate this objective. This subject was researched from 1950-56 by the Kaiser Foundation Psychology Research team. /3/ The ICL was particularly applicable in this case because it measures personality characteristics obviously desirable for employees of a residence halls staff. Also, it was specifically devised to measure Levels I and II of the Interpersonal Personality System, as will be discussed in the next paragraph.

The ICL was designed to measure a number of variables (16) defined by the Interpersonal Personality System. This system attempts to provide a classificatory system for ordering varieties of interpersonal behavior, a notational system ordering levels of interpersonal behavior, and finally, a means of systematically relating these levels of personality to each other making possible an objective description of personality organization and change. The data comprising the interpersonal core of personality are divided into five levels in accordance with their hypothesized significance. The levels are defined in terms of the operations which produce the pertinent data:

> Level I, Public Communication, consists of the overt behavior of the individual as rated by others; i.e., observers rate an S's interpersonal purpose as it appears to them, giving an appraisal of his social "stimulus value."

> Level II, Conscious Description, includes the verbal content of all the statements that the S makes about the interpersonal behavior of himself or "others"; i.e., the S's reported perceptions of himself and his interpersonal world.
>
> Level III, Private Symbolizations, abstracts from the projective indirect fantasy productions of an S an interpersonal symbolic self-image and symbolic world of "others."
>
> Level IV, The Unexpressed Unconscious, is defined to include the interpersonal themes which are systematically and compulsively avoided by the S at all other levels of personality and are conspicuous by their inflexible absence.
>
> Level V, Values, consist of the data which reflect the S's moral-value judgments and his ego ideal: i.e., the interpersonal traits and actions the S includes in his picture of how he should be and would like to be. /2/

LaForge and Suczek /2/ explain further: "The data of interpersonal behavior from each of the levels of personality are ordered in terms of a classificatory system made up of 16 basic interpersonal variables. These are arranged in the form of a circular continuum defining the relationships between elements, i.e., the theoretical degree of relationship between any two variables is a decreasing function of their separation on the perimeter of the circle. Thus, variables juxtaposed on the perimeter of the circle are theoretically similar and should be highly correlated while variables on the opposite side of the circle are logically opposite and should be negatively correlated. A varying degree or intensity of anyone of the 16 variables can also be represented in the circular schema by the distance at which it is placed (or scored) along the radius from the center of the circle. Thus traits represented nearer the center are considered to be of normal, moderate, or appropriate intensity while those at the circumference are considered to indicate an abnormal degree or intensity of the same trait."

Following is a circular schema of the 16 variables of the interpersonal personality system. The ICL, as it is administered to Ss, is an alphabetic listing of these 134 items (of which 128 are scored).

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INTERPERSONAL CHECK LIST ILLUSTRATING THE CLASSIFICATION OF INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIORS INTO SIXTEEN VARIABLE CATEGORIES.

Leary, Timothy. Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality. New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1957, p. 135.

Thus, with the use of the ICL the following question was explored: Can perceived personality characteristics be used as a basis to identify communication problems within an organization?

PROCEDURES:

Each of the 90 members of the University of Montana Residence Hall staff was given a set of three checklists.

The Director and 2 Assistant Directors were each asked to describe himself on one checklist, the upper staff group on another checklist, and the entire resident adviser staff on another checklist. Of this group all responded.

Each member of the upper staff (5 men Head Residents, 3 men Assistant Head Residents, 4 women Head Counselors) was asked to describe himself on one checklist, the group of 3 Directors on another checklist, and the group of resident advisers over whom he was in charge on another checklist. Of this group 8 responded: 4 men and 4 women.

Each member of the resident adviser staff (39 men and 26 women) was asked to describe himself on one checklist, the 3 Directors on another checklist, and the upper staff member under whom he worked on another checklist. Of this group 51 responded: 29 men and 22 women.

Each member of the secretarial staff was asked to describe herself on one checklist, the 3 Directors on another checklist, and the upper staff member under whom she worked on another checklist. All 10 of the Secretaries and House Managers responded.

The instructions on the two types of checklists, i.e., those on which S described himself and those on which he described other groups within the organization were as follows:

> Level II, Conscious Description: (Self-perception)
> In the space provided by each number please check those items which best describe you, as you see yourself, in your position within the Residence Hall system. Choose the items which describe you as you actually see yourself in your position, not as you would like to see yourself.

Level I, Public Communication: (Others' perception)
In the space provided by each number please check those items which best describe _____, as you see _____, in his/their position within the Residence Hall system. Choose the items which describe _____ as you actually see _____ in his/their position, not as you would like to see him/them.

(What completes the blanks was obviously determined by which group was describing which group.)

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS:

The responses were scored along two "dimensions," dominance-submission (DOM) and love-hate (LOV). These dimensions are extracted by a weighted sum of each set of responses to the 128 items. Thus, a subject fell along a continuum of scores between attitudes (or personality characteristics) of dominance and submission, and of love and hate. Two formulae, as designed by the Interpersonal Personality System, were used to measure these dimensions.

An additional summary score, the Average Intensity (AIN), was also figured. This score falls on a scale from 1 to 4 and represents the average intensity of all the 16 variables to which the S responded.

After figuring the DOM, LOV, and AIN for each S, the mean score of the responses of the 3 directors, the mean score of the responses of male and female upper staff members, and the mean score of the responses of male and female resident advisers were figured according to each summary score for each of the three groups they were asked to describe. Following are the summary tables of these scores.

TABLE 1:

DOMINANCE DIMENSION AS PERCEIVED BY:

PERCEPTIONS OF:	Directors	Upper Staff (Group)	Upper Staff Male	Upper Staff Female	RA Staff Group	RA Staff Male	RA Staff Female	Secretaries
Directors	3.5747		6.5343	4.9395		7.1025	6.3852	4.2388
Upper Staff (Group)	7.7700	2.8648						2.6414
Upper Staff Male			4.0088			7.1614		
Upper Staff Female				1.7210			4.7176	
RA Staff (Group)	7.4377				4.0024			
RA Staff Male			-.7438			4.7001		
RA Staff Female				5.2143			3.0393	
Secretaries								-2.3400

TABLE 2:

LOVE DIMENSION AS PERCEIVED BY:

PERCEPTIONS OF:	Directors	Upper Staff Group	Upper Staff Male	Upper Staff Female	RA Staff Group	RA Staff Male	RA Staff Female	Secretaries
Directors	1.0470		-1.1355	-4.9273		-1.6276	2.1025	2.5599
Upper Staff Group	4.8450	-1.6808						2.2049
Upper Staff Male			-6.1138			-1.8621		
Upper Staff Female				2.7720			3.6328	
RA Staff Group	5.1200				2.9344			
RA Staff Male			2.9730			1.3747		
RA Staff Female				5.4373			5.0884	
Secretaries								6.1758

TABLE 3:

AIN DIMENSION AS PERCEIVED BY:

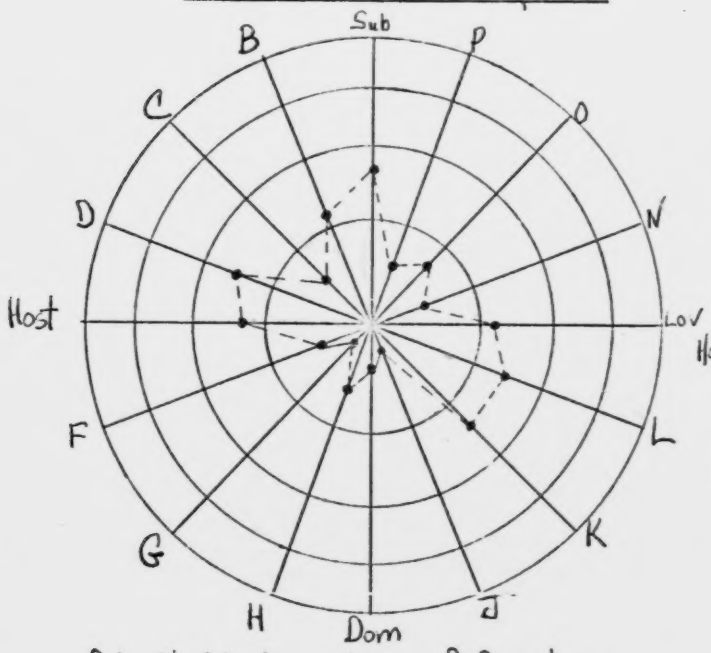
PERCEPTIONS OF:	Directors	Upper Staff Group	Upper Staff Male	Upper Staff Female	RA Staff Group	RA Staff Male	RA Staff Female	Secretaries
Directors	1.8074		1.5995	1.8355		2.0209	1.8997	1.7253
Upper Staff Group	1.7423	1.8716						1.7012
Upper Staff Male			1.7713			2.0070		
Upper Staff Female				1.9720			1.8638	
RA Staff Group	1.6960				1.8841			
RA Staff Male			1.8480			1.8769		
RA Staff Female				1.8063			1.8943	
Secretaries								1.7422

Besides figuring summary measures, the average intensity for each of the 16 variables for each S was scored. This is found in exactly the same manner as the summary AIN score, but using only scores for single variables. Again the mean score was obtained for each of the three groups on each of the 16 variables. With the information obtained, it was possible to construct circular graphic summaries, similar to the circular schema of the interpersonal variables on page 4 of this study. The graphic summary was used to picture one group's perception of another group, as well as the group's own self-perception, according to each of the 16 variables. In the development of the average intensity for each variable, total raw scores for each variable are used and the score of the perceptions of the members of the group are averaged. A total score of eight is possible for each variable--each circle on the circular schema (as shown on page 4) constitutes intervals of two. Adjectives with intensities of 1 and 2 are considered to be of normal, moderate, or appropriate intensity, while those at the circumference are considered to indicate an abnormal degree or intensity of the same trait.

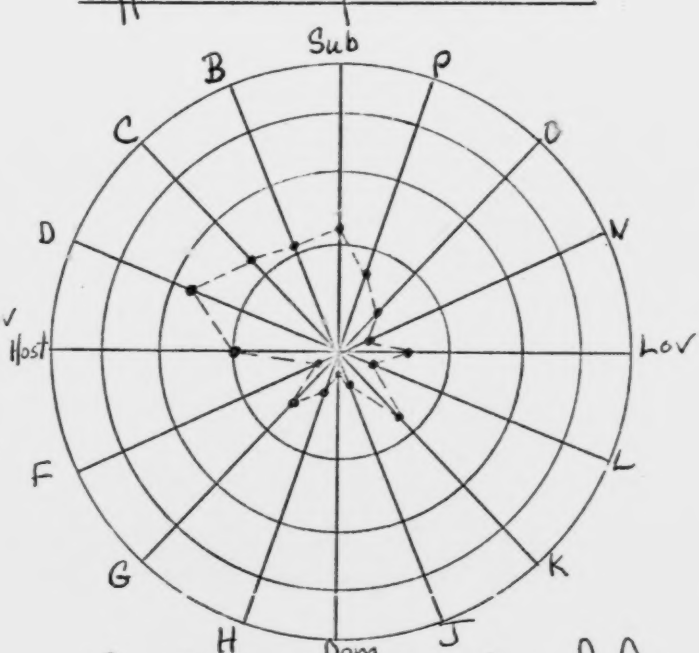
The next page illustrates the sixteenth summaries of the directors' self-perceptions and the Upper Staff, RA Staff, and Secretarial Staff perception of the directors. Because it is impossible to include all the sixteenth summaries of group's self-perceptions and others' perceptions only this set of circular schemas is shown here. However, while in no case did any variable individually exceed the 2-point intensity level in any of the averages computed, there were discrepancies between self and others'

ratings of the individual variables in some cases. How these indications might help in the communication audit of an organization will be explained under the "Discussion" section of this paper.

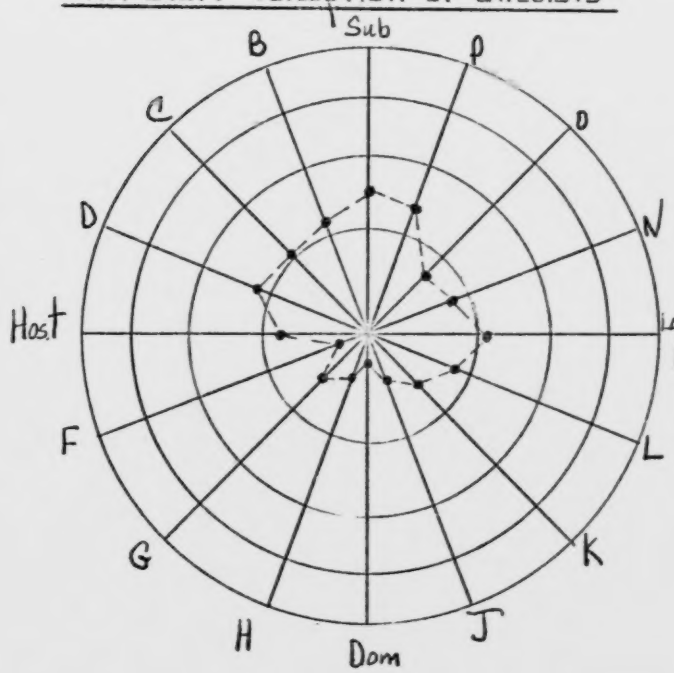
Directors' Self Perception



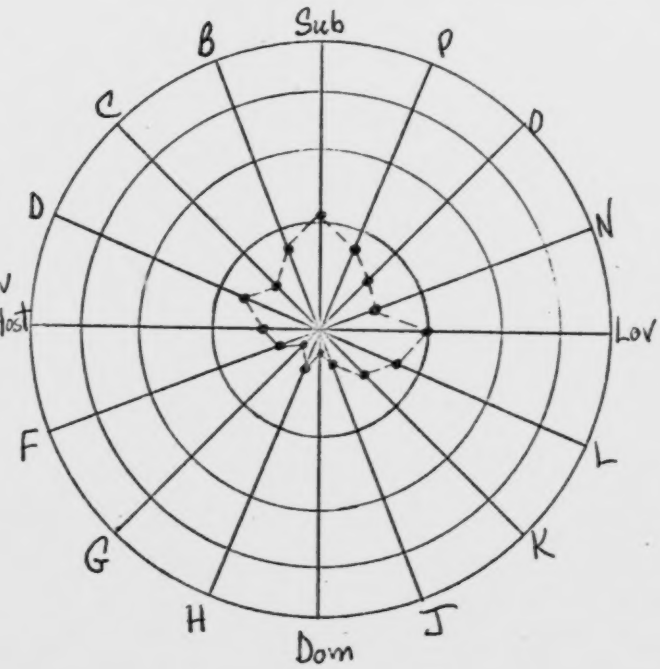
Upper Staff Perception of Directors



RA Staff Perception of Directors



Secretarial Staff Perception of Dir.



DISCUSSION:

The use of the ICL in this investigation is unique from the majority of its previous applications. Ordinarily it is used by one person to rate another person. While the average of several individual ratings of one person has been customarily used, no where have I found one S rating a group of individuals, using one checklist. This may seem an acceptable extension to the use of the ICL, but only through future research and the establishment of representative norms for various groups, or organizations, as such, will this use be verifiable. Thus, this study merely explored the possibilities of using the ICL with an organization, and therefore, cannot offer any hard and fast conclusions about what was uncovered.

Some implications can be drawn from the immediate findings, however. The summary scores are significant in that they provide some picture as to the differences between perceptions of the groups within the Residence Hall staff. The point around which an understanding of the summary scores begins is that the various types of nurturant behavior, as determined from all investigations conducted during the formulation of this personality system, appeared to be blends of strong and affectionate orientations to others. Distrustful behaviors seemed to blend hostility and weakness. Thus, differences do appear among these perceptions and even though the "units" representing the differences are not yet meaningful, for lack of norms, they can provide some base point from which to investigate the effects of personality characteristics on organizational communication.

The graphic sixteenth summaries should be even more helpful in locating large discrepancies between perceptions of each of the 16 individual variables. Restating the present finding: the immediate investigation showed an organization staying between 1 and

2 point intensity levels on both the average intensity for individual variables, as well as the AIN, as described under the "Results" section. Yet, it is suggested that perhaps discrepancies even within these normal or appropriate intensities might help to locate personality conflicts within an organization. A pictorial representation of one's self-perception as opposed to others' perception of him could offer considerable assistance to a consultant in the follow-up interviews of the audit.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY-BUILDING:

Essentially what this study questions is the criteria used in setting up the objectives for a communication audit of an organization. Is it reasonable to approach the study of every organization in the same way? Will the measure of communication flow or effectiveness provide the necessary base points in all investigations into organizational communication problems?

The answer to these questions are simple for anyone who understands the human-communication process. If the individuals making up organizations are unique within themselves, does it not then follow that every organization is unique in at least one respect? And if we are to locate that uniqueness, does it not seem reasonable to begin with the undisputably unique components, i.e., the people making up the organization?

To the non-communicologist, I'm sure that sounds reasonable, if not almost simplistic. However, theoretically this is suggesting an approach to organizational communication which has not as yet won popular acclaim. If we can investigate the personality characteristics of individual organization members, as well as the effects of these characteristics on self-perceptions and others'

perceptions of job performance, are we not more closely approaching the intra-personal core of the human-communication process within organization members, as well as the organization itself? And, in turn, are we not more likely to get at the real causes for communication problems?

The Interpersonal Personality System is but one system, used with one organization, to which its theory and measuring instruments were reasonably applicable. It may work for other organizations and, in fact, will most likely provide valuable information for many organizations with similar objectives.

However, the point which is more important: the closer we come to understanding the intra-personal communication process, whether in individuals or in organizations, the closer we come to understanding the entire human-communication process.

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3. Leary, Timothy. Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality. New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1957.